

Criticism of religion

Criticism of religion involves criticism of the ideas, validity, concept^[1] or the practice of religion, including its political and social implications.^[2]

Historical records of criticism of religion goes back to at least 5th century BCE in ancient Greece, with Diagoras "the Atheist" of Melos. In ancient Rome, an early known example is Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* from the 1st century BCE.

Every exclusive religion on Earth (as well as every exclusive world view) that promotes exclusive truth-claims necessarily denigrates the truth-claims of other religions.^[3] Thus some criticisms of religion become criticisms of one or more aspects of a specific religious tradition.

Critics of religion in general may portray religion as one or more of: outdated, harmful to the individual, harmful to society, an impediment to the progress of science, a source of immoral acts or customs, a political tool for social control.

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Definition of religion

Before the 17th century religion was conflated with every day life. Religion as a modern Western concept developed from the 17th century onwards.^{[4][5][6][7]} For example, in Asia, no one before the 19th century self-identified as a "Hindu" or other similar identities.^{[4][8][4]}

Today, religion is broadly conceived as an abstraction which entails beliefs, doctrines and sacred ~~rules~~—even though the ancient and medieval cultures that produced religious texts, like the Bible or the Quran, did not have such conceptions or ideas in their languages, cultures, or histories.^{[5][4]} However, there is still no scholarly consensus over what a religion is.^{[9][5][4][7]}

History of criticism

In his work *De Rerum Natura* the 1st century BCE Roman poet Titus Lucretius Carus wrote: "But 'tis that same religion oftener far / Hath bred the foul impieties of men".^[10] A philosopher of the Epicurean school, Lucretius believed the world was composed solely of matter and void and that all phenomena could be understood as resulting from purely natural causes. Despite believing in gods, Lucretius, like Epicurus, felt that religion was born of fear and ignorance, and that understanding the natural world would free people of its shackles.^{[11][12]} He was not against religion in and of itself, but against traditional religion which he saw as superstition for teaching that gods interfered with the world.^[13]

At the beginning of the 16th century, Niccolò Machiavelli said: "We Italians are irreligious and corrupt above others... because the church and her representatives have set us the worst example".^[14] To Machiavelli, religion was merely a tool, useful for a ruler wishing to manipulate public opinion.^[15]

In the 18th century, Voltaire was a deist and was strongly critical of religious intolerance. Voltaire complained about Jews killed by other Jews for worshipping a golden calf and similar actions, he also condemned how Christians killed other Christians over religious differences and how Christians killed Native Americans for not being baptised. Voltaire claimed the real reason for these killings was that Christians wanted to plunder the wealth of those killed. ~~M~~taire was also critical of Muslim intolerance.^[16]

Also in the 18th century, David Hume criticised teleological arguments for religion. Hume claimed that natural explanations for the order in the universe were reasonable, see design argument. An important aim of Hume's writings was demonstrating the unsoundness of the philosophical basis for religion.^[17]

In the early 21st century, the New Atheists became focal polemicists in modern criticism of religion.^{[18][19]} The four authors come from widely different backgrounds and have published books which have been the focus of criticism of religion narratives, with over 100 books and hundreds of scholarly articles commenting on and critiquing the "Four Horsemen's" works. Their books and articles have spawned debate in multiple fields of inquiry and are heavily quoted in popular media (online forums, YouTube, television and popular philosophy). In *The End of Faith*, philosopher Sam Harris focuses on violence among other toxic qualities of religion. In *Breaking the Spell*, philosopher Daniel Dennett focuses on the question of "why we believe strange things". In *The God Delusion*, biologist Richard Dawkins covers almost every facet of religion, injecting both snarky irony and humor. In *God Is Not Great*,

journalist and polemicist Christopher Hitchens focused on how religious forces attacks human dignity and the corruption of religious organizations. In the *Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, according to Thomas Zenc the four books were published during a time of intense debate on political, religious and sociological questions. The works share many common themes yet notably differ in scope, style and content. While according to Zenc the beginnings of a broader narrative (New Atheism) seems to have emerged it does not, stand up to the full definition of a movement.^[20]



Christopher Hitchens
journalist and author of *God is not Great*

Criticism of religious concepts

Some criticisms of monotheistic religions have been:

- Religion is wrong as it is in conflict with science (i.e. Genesis creation myth)^[22]
- Revelations conflict internally (i.e. discrepancies in the Bible among the four Gospels of the New Testament)^{[23][24][25]}
- Conflicting claims about the one true faith (also see argument from inconsistent revelations).

Origin and function of religion

Social construct

Dennett and Harris have asserted that theist religions and their scriptures are not divinely inspired, but man made to fulfill social, biological and political needs.^{[26][27]} Dawkins balances the benefits of religious beliefs (mental solace, community building and promotion of virtuous behavior) against the drawbacks.^[28] Such criticisms treat religion as a social construct^[29] and thus just another human ideology.

Narratives to provide comfort and meaning

David Hume argued that religion developed as a source of comfort in the face of the adversity, not as an honest grappling with verifiable truth. Religion is therefore an unsophisticated form of reasoning.^[30]

Daniel Dennett has argued that, with the exception of more modern religions such as Raelism, Mormonism, Scientology and the Bahá'í Faith, most religions were formulated at a time when the origin of life, the workings of the body, and the nature of the stars and planets were poorly understood.^[31] These narratives were intended to give solace and a sense of relationship with larger forces. As such, they may have served several important functions in ancient societies. Examples include the views many religions traditionally had towards solar and lunar eclipses and the appearance of comets (forms of astrology).^{[32][33]} Given current understanding of the physical world, where human knowledge has increased dramatically, Dawkins and French atheist philosopher Michel Onfray contend that continuing to hold on to these belief systems is irrational and no longer useful.^{[28][34]}

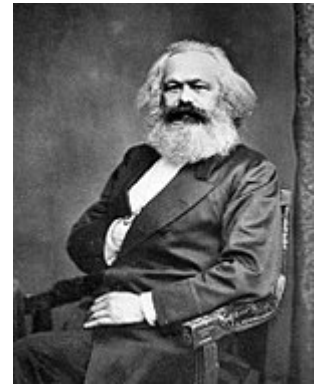


A sign by the Connecticut Valley Atheists in Rockville's Central Park, Vernon in December 2007, that criticizes religion and draws attention to the September 11 attacks, with the group issuing an explanatory press release: "Clearly 9/11 is the work of fanatics. However, we feel that religion even in moderation provides a foundation for fanatical groups to thrive"^[21]

Opium of the people

Religious suffering is, at the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

— Karl Marx^[35]



Karl Marx

According to Karl Marx, the father of "scientific socialism", religion is a tool used by the ruling classes whereby the masses can shortly relieve their suffering via the act of experiencing religious emotions. It is in the interest of the ruling classes to instill in the masses the religious conviction that their current suffering will lead to eventual happiness. Therefore, as long as the public believes in religion, they will not attempt to make any genuine effort to understand and overcome the real source of their suffering, which in Marx's opinion was their capitalist economic system. In this perspective, Marx saw religion as escapism.^[35]

Marx also viewed the Christian doctrine of original sin as being deeply anti-social in character. Original sin, he argued, convinces people that the source of their misery lies in the inherent and unchangeable "sinfulness" of humanity rather than in the forms of social organization and institutions, which Marx argued can be changed through the application of collective social planning.^[36]

Viruses of the mind

In his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins coined the term memes to describe informational units that can be transmitted culturally, analogous to genes.^[37] He later used this concept in the essay "Viruses of the Mind" to explain the persistence of religious ideas in human culture.^[38]



Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*

Response to virus of the mind criticism

Both the religious and non religious are critical of Dawkins' meme theory which has mostly been abandoned. Some have criticized the idea that "God" and "Faith" are viruses of the mind, suggesting that it is far removed from evidence and data" that it is unreasonable to extract certain behaviours solely through religious memes.^[39] Alister McGrath has responded by arguing that "memes have no place in serious scientific reflection",^[40] or that religious ideas function the way Dawkins claims.^[41]

Mental illness or delusion

Sam Harris compares religion to mental illness, saying it "allows otherwise normal human beings to reap the fruits of madness and consider them *holy*".^[42] According to a retrospective study on Abraham, Moses, Jesus Christ, and the Apostle Paul, they may have had psychotic disorders that contributed inspiration for their revelations. They conclude that people with such disorders have had a monumental influence on civilization.^[43]

Psychological studies into the phenomenon of mysticism link disturbing aspects of certain mystics' experiences to childhood abuse.^{[44][45][46]} Clifford A. Pickover found evidence suggesting that temporal lobe epilepsy may be linked to a variety of so-called spiritual or "other worldly" experiences, such as spiritual possession originating from altered electrical activity in the brain.^[47] Carl Sagan, in his last book *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*, presented his case for the miraculous sightings of religious figures and modern sightings of UFOs coming from the same mental disorder. Vilayanur S. Ramachandran suggests "It's possible that many great religious leaders had temporal lobe seizures and this predisposes them to having visions, having mystical experiences".^[48] Michael Persinger stimulated the temporal lobes of the brain artificially with a magnetic field using a device nicknamed the "God helmet" and was able to artificially induce religious experiences along with near-death experiences and ghost

sightings.^[49] According to John Bradshaw "Some forms of temporal lobe tumours or epilepsy are associated with extreme religiosity." In his research recent brain imaging of religious subjects praying or meditating show identical activity in the respective human section of the brain which Ramachandran calls God-spots.

Psilocybin from mushrooms affect regions of the brain including the serotonergic system, which generating a sense of strong religious meaning, unity and ecstasy Certain physical rituals may generate similar feelings.^[50]

In Michael Shermer's book *Why People Believe Strange Things* he theorizes on how emerging mankind imposed made-up explanations and bizarre rituals for natural phenomena they didn't and couldn't understand. This is similar to the arguments made by Daniel Dennett in *Breaking the Spell*^[51] however Shermer's argument goes further in that the peculiar and at times frightening rituals of religion are but one of many forms of strange customs that survive to this day.^[52]

Immature stage of societal development

Philosopher Auguste Comte posited that many societal constructs pass through three stages and that religion corresponds to the two earlier, or more primitive stages by stating: "From the study of the development of human intelligence, in all directions, and through all times, the discovery arises of a great fundamental law, to which it is necessarily subjective, and which has a solid foundation of proof, both in the facts of our organization and in our historical experience. The law is this: that each of our leading conceptions – each branch of our knowledge – passes successively through three different theoretical conditions: the theological, or fictitious; the metaphysical, or abstract; and the scientific, or positive"^[53]



Philosophy and Christian Art, W. Ridgway, 1878

Response to criticism

In his book *Is Religion Dangerous?*, Keith Ward notes that not all false opinions are delusions and that belief in God is different as many great minds and people who live ordinary lives and believe in God are not irrational people.^[54] Hyperreligiosity or even "intensely professed atheism" can emerge from emotional disturbances involving temporal lobe epilepsy.^[55]

Harm to individuals

Some have criticized the effects of adherence to dangerous practices such as self-sacrifice.^[56]

Inadequate medical care

A detailed study in 1998 found 140 instances of deaths of children due to religion-based medical neglect. Most of these cases involved Christian parents relying on prayer to cure the child's disease and withholding medical care.^[57]

Jerusalem syndrome

Jerusalem has loaned its name to a unique psychological phenomenon where Jewish or Christian individuals who develop obsessive religious themed ideas or delusions (sometimes believing themselves to be Jesus Christ or another prophet) will feel compelled to travel to Jerusalem.^{[58][59]}

During a period of 13 years (1980–1993) for which admissions to the Kfar Shaul Mental Health Centre in Jerusalem were analyzed, it was reported^[60] that 1,200 tourists with severe, Jerusalem-themed mental problems, were referred to this clinic. Of these, 470 were admitted to hospital. On average, 100 such tourists have been seen annually, 40 of them requiring admission to hospital. About 2 million tourists visit Jerusalem each year. Kallian and Witztum note that as a proportion of the total numbers of tourists visiting the city, this is not significantly different from any other city.^{[61][62]} The statements of these claims has however been disputed, with the arguments that experiencers of the Jerusalem syndrome already were mentally ill.^{[61][63]}

Honor killings and stoning

Honor killings once well known in the Western countries are now extremely rare, however, they still occur in other parts of the world. An honor killing is when a person is killed by family for bringing dishonor or shame upon the family.^[64]

Stoning is a form of capital punishment whereby a group throws stones at a person until death ensues. As of September 2010, stoning is a punishment that is included in the laws in some countries including Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Yemen, the United Arab Emirates, and some states in Nigeria^[65] as punishment for zina al-mohsena ("adultery of married persons").^[66] While stoning may not be codified in the laws of Afghanistan and Somalia, both countries have seen several incidents of stoning to death.^{[67][68]}

Until the early 2000s, stoning was a legal form of capital punishment in Iran. In 2002, the Iranian judiciary officially placed a moratorium on stoning.^[69] In 2005, judiciary spokesman Jamal Karimirad stated that "in the Islamic republic, we do not see such punishments being carried out", further adding that if stoning sentences were passed by lower courts, they were overruled by higher courts and "no such verdicts have been carried out".^[70] In 2008, the judiciary decided to fully scrap the punishment from the books in legislation submitted to parliament for approval.^[71] In early 2013, Iranian parliament published official report about excluding stoning from penal code and it accused Western media for spreading "noisy propaganda" about the case.^[72]



Saint Francis Borgiaperforming an exorcism, Francisco Goya

Genital modification and mutilation

According to the World Health Organization, female genital mutilation has no health benefits and is a violation of basic human rights. Though no first tier religious texts prescribe the practice, some practitioners do believe there is religious support for it. While it is mostly found in Muslim countries, it is also practiced by some Christian and Animist countries mostly in Africa. GFA is not widely practiced in some Muslim countries making it difficult to separate religion from culture. Some religious leaders promote it, some consider it irrelevant to religion, and others contribute to its elimination". The practice is illegal in all Western countries and it is also illegal to transport a girl to another country to carry out FGM. Multiple parents have been charged for committing this crime in the United Kingdom with those charged being exclusively from Muslim countries.^[73] The Jewish Bible, the New Testament, and the Quran themselves do not contain textual support for the practice of female genital mutilation even though the practice predates both Islam and Christianity^[74]

Male circumcision is required in Judaism, optional in Islam, and not required in Christianity. Globally, male circumcision is done for religious, social, and health promotion reasons.^{[75][76]}

Counterarguments to religion as harmful to individuals

A metareview of 850 research papers on Religion in the United States concluded that "the majority of well-conducted studies found that higher levels of religious involvement are positively associated with indicators of psychological well-being (life satisfaction, happiness, positive affect, and higher morale) and with less depression, suicidal thoughts and behavior, drug/alcohol use/abuse".^{[77][78]} In addition, various surveys done by major opinion poll organizations in the United States including Gallup, a review of 200 papers,^{[79][80]} a meta analysis of 35 surveys^[81] another review of 498 papers^[82] and the handbook of religion. Surveys suggest a strong link between faith and altruism.^[83] and a meta analysis of 34 recent studies^[84] showing that membership of

religious groups in the United States was positively correlated with membership of voluntary organizations, higher level of commitment, better self-esteem, are twice as likely to have a more satisfying sex life and lower risk of suicide, higher levels self-esteem, self-actualization and life satisfaction.

A cross-national investigation on subjective well-being has noted that, globally religious people are usually happier than nonreligious people, though nonreligious people also reach high levels of happiness.^[85]

As of 2001, It should be noted that almost all of these studies were conducted within the United States and deal with subjectively reported life happiness.^[86] There is no significant correlation between religiosity and individual happiness in Denmark and the Netherlands, countries that have lower rates of religion, lower discrimination against atheists and where both the religious and non-religious are normative.^[87] The 2013 World Happiness Report mentions that once crude factors are taken into account, there are no differences in life satisfaction between religious and less religious countries.

Despite honor killings occurring in multiple cultures and religions, Islam is frequently blamed for their institution and persistence. Professor Tahira Shaid Khan notes that there is nothing in the Qur'an that permits or sanctions honor killings^[88] and attributes it to broader attitudes that view women as property with no rights as the explanation for honor killings.^[88] Khan also argues that this view results in violence against women and their being turned "into a commodity which can be exchanged, bought and sold".^[89]

Harm to society

Some aspects of religion are criticized on the basis that they damage society as a whole. Steven Weinberg, for example, states it takes religion to make good people do evil.^[90] Bertrand Russell and Richard Dawkins cite religiously inspired or justified violence, resistance to social change, attacks on science, repression of women and homophobia.^[91]

Hartung has claimed that major religious moral codes can lead to "us vs. them" group solidarity and mentality which can dehumanise or demonise individuals outside their group as "not fully human", or less worthy. Results can vary from mild discrimination to outright genocide.^[92] A poll by The Guardian noted that 82% of the British people believe that religion is socially divisive and that this effect is harmful despite the observation that non-believers outnumber believers 2 to 1.^[93]

According to one study, membership of a religious group can accentuate biases in behavior toward in group versus out group members, which may explain the lower number of interracial friends and greater approval of torture among church members.^[94]

Holy war and religious terrorism

While terrorism is a complex subject, it is argued that terrorists are partially reassured by their religious views of God's support and reward for their actions.^{[95][96]}

These conflicts are among the most difficult to resolve, particularly where both sides believe that God is on their side and has endorsed the moral righteousness of their claims.^[95] One of the most infamous quotes associated with religious fanaticism was made in 1209 during the siege of Béziers, a Crusader asked the Papal Legate Arnaud Amalric how to tell Catholics from Cathars when the city was taken, to which Amalric replied: "Tuez-les tous; Dieu reconnaitra les siens", or "Kill them all; God will recognize his own".^[97]

Theoretical physicist Michio Kaku considers religious terrorism as one of the main threats in humanity's evolution from a Type 0 to Type 1 civilization.^[98]

Suppression of scientific progress

John William Draper and Andrew Dickson White, authors of the conflict thesis, have argued that when a religion offers a complete set of answers to the problems of purpose, morality, origins, or science, it often discourages exploration of those areas by suppressing curiosity, denies its followers a broader perspective and can prevent social, moral and scientific progress. Examples cited in their writings include the trial of Galileo and Giordano Bruno's execution.

During the 19th century, the conflict thesis developed. According to this model, any interaction between religion and science must inevitably lead to open hostility, with religion usually taking the part of the aggressor against new scientific ideas.^[101] The historical conflict thesis was a popular historiographical approach in the history of science during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but its original form is almost entirely discarded by scholars today.^{[102][103][104]} Despite that, conflict theory remains a popular view among the general public^[105] and has been publicized by the success of books such as *The God Delusion*



Entry of the Crusaders into Constantinople by Gustave Doré (1832–1883)

Historians of science including John Hedley Brooke and Ronald Numbers consider the "religion vs. science" concept an oversimplification, and prefer to take a more nuanced view of the subject.^{[105][106]} These historians cite, for example, the Galileo affair^[107] and the Scopes trial;^[108] and assert that these were not purely instances of conflict between science and religion as personal and political factors also weighed heavily in the development of each. In addition, some historians contend that religious organizations figure prominently in the broader histories of many sciences, with many of the scientific minds until the professionalization of scientific enterprise (in the 19th century) being clergy and other religious thinkers.^{[109][110][111]} Some historians contend that many scientific developments such as Kepler's laws^[112] and the 19th century reformulation of physics in terms of energy^[113] were explicitly driven by religious ideas.

Recent examples of tensions have been the creation-evolution controversy, controversies over the use of birth control, opposition to research into embryonic stem cells, or theological objections to vaccination, anesthesia and blood transfusion^{[114][115][116][117][118]}

Counterarguments to religion as harmful to society

Some studies show some positive links in the relationship between religiosity and moral behavior and altruism.^{[119][120][121]} Some studies have shown similar correlations between religiosity and giving.^[122]

Some argue that religious violence confuses religious moral rules and behaviour with non-religious factors.^{[123][124][125][126]} This includes the claim that events like terrorist bombings are more politically motivated than religious.^{[125][127][128]} Mark Juergensmeyer argues that religion "does not ordinarily lead to violence. That happens only with the coalescence of a peculiar set of circumstances—political, social, and ideological—when religion becomes fused with violent expressions of social aspirations, personal pride, and movements for political change".^{[129]:10} and that it is unreasonable to attempt to differentiate "religious violence" and "secular violence" as separate categories.^[130] While others assert religion is not inherently violent and while the two are compatible they are not essential and that religious violence can be compared with non-religious violence.^[131]

C. S. Lewis suggests that all religions by definition involve faith, or a belief in concepts that cannot be proven or disproven by the sciences. Not all religious people subscribe to the idea that religion and science are mutually exclusive (non-overlapping magisteria) as do some atheists including Stephen Jay Gould.^[132] Biologist Richard Dawkins has said that religious practitioners often do not believe in the view of non-overlapping magisteria.^[133]



Galileo Galilei facing the Roman Inquisition, Cristiano Banti^{[99][100]}

According to a survey most religious groups in the United States have no general epistemological conflict with science or with the seeking out of scientific knowledge even if there are epistemic or moral conflicts with their faith.^{[134][135]} Strict creationists tend to have very favorable views on many of the different sciences.^[136] A study on a national sample of United States college students found that the majority of undergraduates in both the natural and social sciences do not see conflict between science and religion.^[137] Cross-national studies polled from 1981–2001 on views of science and religion have noted that countries with higher religiosity have stronger trust in science!^[138]

Morality

Richard Dawkins contends that theistic religions devalue human compassion and morality. In his view, the Bible contains many injunctions against following one's conscience over scripture and positive actions are supposed to originate not from compassion, but from the fear of punishment.^[28] Albert Einstein stated that no religious basis is needed in order to display ethical behavior.^[139]

Survey research suggests that believers do tend to hold views different from those of non-believers on a variety of social, ethical and moral questions. According to a 2003 survey conducted in the United States by The Barna Group those who described themselves as believers were less likely than those describing themselves as atheists or agnostics to consider the following behaviors morally acceptable: cohabitating with someone of the opposite sex outside marriage, enjoying sexual fantasies, having an abortion, sexual relationships outside marriage, gambling, consuming marijuana, looking at pictures of nudity or explicit sexual behavior, getting drunk and "having a sexual relationship with someone of the same sex".^[140]

Children

In the 19th century, philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer argued that teaching some ideas to children at a young age could foster resistance to doubting those ideas later on.^[141]

Islam has permitted the child marriage of older men to girls as young as 9 years of age.^[142] Baptist pastor Jerry Vines denounced Mohammed as a pedophile for marrying and having had sex with a nine-year-old, referring to Muhammad as a "demon-possessed paedophile".^[143]

For example, one organisation cites the case of a 10-year-old girl who was forced to marry and was raped in Yemen (Nujood Ali),^[144] a 13-year-old Yemeni girl dying of internal bleeding three days after marriage^{[145][146]} and a 12-year-old girl dying in childbirth after marriage.^{[142][147]} Yemen currently does not have aminimum age for marriage^[148]

Latter Day Saint church founder Joseph Smith married girls as young as 13 and 14^[149] and other Latter Day Saints married girls as young as 10.^[150] The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints eliminated underaged marriages in the 19th century, but several branches of Mormonism continue the practice.^[151]

Homosexuals

Homosexuality is unambiguously condemned in Abrahamic religions where prohibition and execution of those who engage in male homosexual activity are found in the Old testament of the bible and in the Quran. Homosexuals are also condemned in the New Testament several times but without obligatory punishment. In the United States, conservative Christian right groups such as the Christian Legal Society and the Alliance Defense Fund have filed numerous lawsuits against public universities, aimed at overturning policies that protect homosexuals from discrimination and hate speech. These groups argue that such policies infringe their right to freely exercise religion as guaranteed by the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution^[152]

Most secularised Christian countries have legalised homosexual activity and several have legalised same-sex marriage. However, not all historically Christian countries have done so such as Russia and Uganda which have introduced discriminatory laws ranging from anti-propaganda laws to corporal punishment. Homosexuality is still illegal in most Muslim countries and several of these countries impose the death penalty for homosexual behavior. In July 2005, two Iranian men aged sixteen and eighteen were, supposedly, hanged for homosexuality, causing an international outcry.^[153] They were executed after being convicted by the court of having

raped a 13-year-old boy.^{[154][155][156]} The case attracted international media attention. The British lesbian, gay and bisexual group OutRage!,^[157] alleged that the teenagers were executed for consensual homosexual acts and not rape.

Racism

In line with other findings suggesting that religious humanitarianism is largely directed at in-group members, greater religious identification, greater extrinsic religiosity and greater religious fundamentalism were associated with racial prejudice. This is congruent with the fact that 50% of religious congregations in the US are racially segregated and only 12% have a degree of diversity.^[158]

Religion has been used by some as justification for advocating racism. The Christian Identity movement has been associated with racism.^[159] However, there are arguments that these positions may be as much reflections of contemporary social views as of what has been called scientific racism.^[160]

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had excluded African Americans from the priesthood from 1860 to 1978.^[161] Most fundamentalist Mormon sects within the Latter Day Saint movement, rejected the Church's 1978 decision to allow African Americans to hold the priesthood and continue to deny activity in the church due to race.^[162] Due to these beliefs, in its Spring 2005 "Intelligence Report" the Southern Poverty Law Center added the Church to its "hate group" listing^[163] because of the church's teachings on race, which include a strong condemnation of interracial relationships



A Westboro Baptist Church picket in Northlake, Illinois on November 29, 2005



Burning cross often used by Ku Klux Klan to intimidate minorities

Women

The content of the holy books of Abrahamic religions contain severe restrictions on the rights of women ranging from prohibiting women from certain behaviour and activities to requiring women to submit to the will of their father and or husband.

According to Polly Toynbee, religion interferes with bodily autonomy for both genders and fosters particularly negative attitudes towards women's bodies. Tynbee writes: "Women's bodies are always the issue - too unclean to bishops, and dangerous enough to be covered up by Islam and mikvahed by Judaism".^[164]

It is argued that religious sexual discrimination leads to unequal relations in marriage, creating norms which subordinate the wife to the husband. The word בַּעַל (*ba'al*), Hebrew for "husband", used throughout the Bible, is synonymous with "owner" and "master".^[165] This mirrors the abrahamic view of God as an omnipotent, perfect power, where this power is one of domination, which is persistently associated with the characteristics of idealmasculinity.^[166] Sheila Jeffreys argues:

"Religion gives authority to traditional, patriarchal beliefs about the essentially subordinate nature of women and their naturally separate roles, such as the need for women to be confined to the private world of the home and family, that women should be obedient to their husbands, that women's sexuality should be modest and under the control of their menfolk, and that women should not use contraception or abortion to limit their childbearing. The practice of such ancient beliefs interferes profoundly with women's abilities to exercise their human rights".^[167]

Islam

Feminist Julie Bindel argues that religions encourage the domination of men over women and that Islam promotes the submission of women to their husbands and encourages practices such as child marriage. She wrote that religion "promotes inequality between men and women", that Islam's message for a woman includes that "she will be subservient to her husband and devote her life to pleasing him" and that "Islam's obsession with virginity and childbirth has led to gender segregation and early marriage."^[168]

Islamic laws have been criticized by human rights organizations for exposing women to mistreatment and violence, preventing women from reporting rape and contributing to the discrimination of women.^[169] The United Nations say that Islam is used to justify unnecessary and harmful female genital mutilation, when the purposes range from deprivation of sexual satisfaction to discourage adultery, insuring virginity to their husbands, or generating appearance of virginity.^[170] Maryam Namazie argues that women are victimized under Sharia law, both in criminal matters (such as punishment for improper veiling) and in civil matters; and also that women have judicial hurdles that are lenient or advantageous for men.^[171]

According to Phyllis Chesler, Islam is connected to violence against women, especially in the form of honor killings. She rejects the argument that honor killings are not related to Islam and claims that while fundamentalists of all religions place restrictions on women, in Islam not only are these restrictions harsher, but Islam also reacts more violently when these rules are broken.^[172]



A woman with burqa on walking by the road in northern Afghanistan

Christianity

Christianity has been criticized for painting women as sinful, untrustful, deceiving and desiring to seduce and incite men into sexual sin.^[173] Katharine M. Rogers argues that Christianity is misogynistic and that the "dread of female seduction" can be found in St. Paul's epistles.^[174] K. K. Ruthven argues that the "legacy of Christian misogyny was consolidated by the so-called 'Fathers' of the Church, like Tertullian, who thought a woman was not only 'the gateway of the devil' but also 'a temple built over a sewer'".^[175] Jack Holland argues the concept of fall of man is misogynistic as "a myth that blames woman for the ills and sufferings of mankind".^[176]

Christian religious figures have been involved in the Middle Ages and early modern period witch trials, which were generally used to punish assertive or independent women such as amidwives since witchcraft was often not in evidence,^[177] or activists.^[178]

Animals

Kosher slaughter has historically attracted criticism from non-Jews as allegedly being inhumane and unsanitary,^[179] in part as an antisemitic canard that eating ritually slaughtered meat caused degeneration^[180] and in part out of economic motivation to remove Jews from the meat industry.^[179] Sometimes these criticisms were directed at Judaism as a religion. In 1893, animal advocates campaigning against kosher slaughter in Aberdeen attempted to link cruelty with Jewish religious practice.^[181] In the 1920s, Polish critics of kosher slaughter claimed that the practice actually had no basis in Scripture.^[179] In contrast, Jewish authorities argue that the slaughter methods are based directly upon Genesis IX:3 and that "these laws are binding on Jews today".^[182]

While supporters of kosher slaughter counter that Judaism requires the practice precisely because it is considered humane,^[182] Research conducted by Temple Grandin and Joe M. Regenstein in 1994 concluded that—practiced correctly with proper restraint systems—kosher slaughter results in little pain and suffering and notes that behavioral reactions to the incision made during kosher slaughter are less than those to noises such as clanging or hissing, inversion or pressure during restraint.^[183] Those who practice and subscribe religiously and philosophically to Jewish vegetarianism disagree, stating that such slaughter is not required while a number, including medieval scholars of Judaism such as Joseph Albo and Isaac Arama, regard vegetarianism as a moral ideal, not just out of a concern for animal welfare, but also the slaughterer.^[184]

Other forms of ritual slaughter, such as Islamic ritual slaughter, have also come under controversy. Writing for PETA, Logan Scherer said that animals sacrificed according to Islamic law can not be stunned before they are killed.^[185] Muslims are only allowed to eat meat that has been killed according to Sharia law and they say that Islamic law on ritual slaughter is designed to reduce the pain and distress that the animal suffers.^[186]

According to the Farm Animal Welfare Committee, halal and kosher practices should be banned because when animals are not stunned before death, they suffer needless pain for up to 2 minutes despite some Muslims and Jews arguing that loss of blood from slash to the throat renders the animals unconscious relatively quickly.^[187]

Response to criticism of morality

Not all religions are hostile to homosexuality. Both Reform Judaism and the Unitarian Universalist Association have advocated for equal rights for gay and lesbian people since the 1970s.^[a] Hinduism does not view homosexuality as an issue.^[190]

Many Christians have made efforts toward establishing racial equality, contributing to the civil rights movement.^[191] *The African American Review* sees as important the role Christian revivalism in the black church played in the civil rights movement.^[192] Martin Luther King Jr., an ordained Baptist minister, was a leader of the American civil rights movement and president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference a Christian civil rights organization.^[193]

Corrupt purposes of leaders

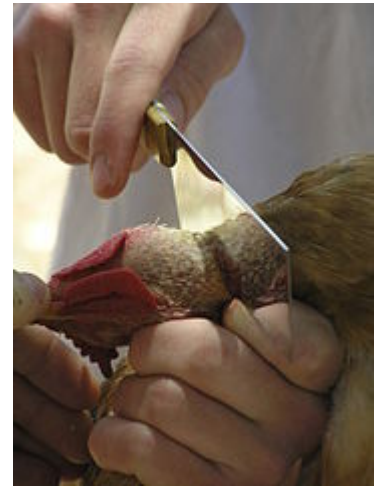
Corrupt or immoral leaders

Dominionism

The term "dominionism" is often used to describe a political movement among fundamentalist Christians. Critics view dominionism as an attempt to improperly impose Christianity as the national faith of the United States. It emerged in the late 1980s inspired by the book, film and lecture series "Whatever Happened to the Human Race?" by Francis A. Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop.^[194] Schaeffer's views influenced conservatives like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Tim LaHaye, John W. Whitehead and although they represent different theological and political ideas, dominionists believe they have a Christian duty to take "control of a sinful secular society", either by putting fundamentalist Christians in office, or by introducing biblical law into the secular sphere.^{[114][195][196]} Social scientists have used the word "dominionism" to refer to adherence to dominion theology^{[197][198][199]} as well as to the influence in the broader Christian right of ideas inspired by dominion theology.^[197]

In the early 1990s, sociologist Sara Diamond^{[200][201]} and journalist Frederick Clarkson^{[202][203]} defined "dominionism" as a movement that while including dominion theology and Christian reconstructionism as subsets, it is much broader in scope, extending to much of the Christian right.^[204] Beginning in 2004 with essayist Katherine Yurica,^{[205][206][207]} a group of authors including journalist Chris Hedges^{[208][209][210]} Marion Maddox,^[211] James Rudin,^[212] Sam Harris^[213] and the group TheocracyWatch,^[214] began applying the term to a broader spectrum of people than have sociologists such as Diamond.

Response to criticism of dominionism



Shechita slaughter of a chicken



Caricature of Mormon leader Brigham Young's wives at his death

There are few full adherents to reconstructionism are limited to conservative Christians.^{[215][216][217]} The terms "dominionist" and "dominionism" are rarely used for self-description and their usage has been attacked from several quarters noting that the term is vague, unfairly links evangelicals to extremism, is highly exaggerated and are more akin to conservative smear in the likes of a conspiracy theory.^{[218][219]} Journalist Anthony Williams charged that its purpose is "to smear the Republican Party as the party of domestic Theocracy, facts be damned".^{[220][221][222]} Kurtz also complained about a perceived link between average Christian evangelicals and extremism such as Christian reconstructionism.^[221]

Notable critics of religion

- Douglas Adams
- Ayaan Hirsi Ali
- George Carlin
- Richard Dawkins
- Daniel Dennett
- Karlheinz Deschner
- Sam Harris
- Christopher Hitchens
- Baron d'Holbach
- David Hume
- Lawrence Krauss
- Ludwig Feuerbach
- Bill Maher
- Karl Marx
- Friedrich Nietzsche
- Thomas Paine
- Bertrand Russell
- Marquis de Sade
- Dayanand Saraswati
- Mark Twain
- Voltaire

See also

- *A Brief History of Disbelief*– three-part PBS series (2007)
- Anthropology of religion
- Antireligion
- Antitheism
- Apologetics
- Atheism
- Biblical inerrancy
- Christianity and violence
- Civil religion
- Cognitive dissonance
- Conversational intolerance
- Deism
- Ethics without religion
- Folk religion
- God is dead
- Metaethics
- Morality without religion
- Philosophy of religion
- Problem of evil
- Theodicy
- Psychology of religion

- Rationalism
- Religiosity and intelligence
- Religious paranoia
- Religious satire
- Russell's teapot
- Social criticism
- Sociology of religion
- Supernatural
- Toleration
- Theism
- Theology
- True-believer syndrome

Criticism of specific religions and worldviews

- Controversies about Opus Dei
- Criticism of Atheism
- Criticism of the Bahá'í Faith
- Criticism of Buddhism
- Criticism of Christianity
 - Criticism of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
 - Criticism of Jehovah's Witnesses
 - Criticism of the Roman Catholic Church
- Criticism of Hinduism
- Criticism of Islam
- Criticism of Jainism
- Criticism of Judaism
- Criticism of Sikhism
- Scientology controversy

Notes

- a. In 1970, the UUA passed a resolution calling for an end to anti-gay discrimination.^[188] The Union for Reform Judaism passed a similar resolution in 1977.^[189]

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See also:
Katharine Gelber; Adrienne Sarah Ackary Stone (2007)(<https://books.google.com/books?id=Y3oYYweMrF8C>)*late Speech and Freedom of Speech in Australia*(<https://books.google.com/books?id=Y3oYYweMrF8C>)*Federation Press. p. 179. ISBN 978-1-86287-653-8* "In some belief systems, religious leaders and believers maintain the right to both emphasise the benefits of their own religion and criticise other religions; that is, they make their own claims and deny the truth claims of others"
Michael Herz; Peter Molnar (9 April 2012)(<https://books.google.com/books?id=KC0gAAQBAJ>)*The Content and Context of Hate Speech: Rethinking Regulation and Responses*(<https://books.google.com/books?id=KC0gAAQBAJ>). *Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-1-107-37561-1* "people of every religion, as well as of no religion, have a reason for wanting it to be possible to face other people with challenges to their faith, namely that this is the only way those people can be brought to see the truth".
"NO COMPULSION IN RELIGION: AN ISLAMIC CASE AGAINST BLASPHEMY LAWS" (<https://web.archive.org/web/20160304053408/http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/no-compulsion-in-religion.pdf>) (PDF). Quilliam Foundation. Archived from the original (<http://www.quilliamfoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/publications/free/no-compulsion-in-religion.pdf>) (PDF) on 2016-03-04. "Due to the nature of religious belief, one person's faith often implies that another's is wrong and perhaps even offensive, constituting blasphemy For example, the major world religions often have very different formulations and beliefs concerning god or gods, Muhammad, Jesus, Buddha and the Hindu deities, as well as about various ethical and social matters
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External links

- A Historical Outline of Modern Religious Criticism in Western Civilization
 - The Science of Religion by Gregory S. Paul
 - The Poverty of Theistic Morality by Adolf Grünbaum
 - Is there an Artificial God? by Douglas Adams
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